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THE PRINTED TEXT OF FOUR FABLIAUX IN THE *Recueil*

général et complet des fabliaux

COMPARED WITH THE READINGS IN THE
HARLEIAN MS., 2253.

Whatever the literary value of the Fabliaux may be, their value as records of the French language is incontestable. Perhaps no other documents of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries bring us so close to the every-day speech of that time. Hence the desirability of publishing them accurately,—though accuracy is desirable wherever knowledge is to be obtained. Old-fashioned editors have tampered and tinkered to such a degree in many cases that it seems as if they deserved to be described, not as editors, but as belated and unbidden collaborators of the original authors. For persons of this kind there is no harm in leaving out a verse or so from time to time, or even a page, if need be, and the omission is often made in silence. Others silently alter what they do not like or cannot understand.

But science looks askance on such methods nowadays. The documents of the past have won respect; to cite them wrongly is considered a misdemeanour, though the fairminded are always ready to allow for the difficulties that most scholars have to encounter, and the difficulties are numerous. Sometimes a manuscript has to be copied by whoever can be got to copy it; often the copy is less legible than the original; sometimes the printer is at fault, or eyes fail, or notes are lost. In short, a thousand difficulties lie in the road, and a thousand mishaps may occur before the work is finished.

For these reasons anything that might be taken amiss in the comparisons that follow may be considered to have arisen from a desire to state the facts as plainly as possible rather than from an intention to criticise unfavourably a valuable con-

tribution to the stock of knowledge now at our disposal in the field of Romance literature.

Although no precise statement to that effect is to be found in the first, or even in later volumes, of the *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux*, it seems clear that the aim of Anatole de Montaiglon, and subsequently of his collaborator, M. Gaston Raynaud as well, was to print the one hundred and fifty or more extant fabliaux as they are found in the manuscripts, without attempting to edit them to any considerable extent. Indeed, no avowed alterations whatever were made in the text of the pieces printed in the first volume, all of which Montaiglon declares in his *Avant-propos* (xiv-xv) to be derived from the one manuscript that has preserved them—"le premier volume n'a pas de variantes parce que les pieces qui y sont contenues ne se trouvent que dans un seul manuscrit." In Vol. II, however, it comes to light that several of the said pieces are to be found in other manuscripts, and in Vol. II begin the *Notes et Variantes*, which occur in each later volume. Exactly what method is followed in printing the texts is not quite clear. One finds random remarks on this head scattered along infrequently. Whatever the truth may be, neither the text nor the *Notes et Variantes* of the *Recueil* show precisely and in a thoroughly trustworthy manner what is found in the Harleian ms. 2253, and therefore I shall try to set the matter straight for four fabliaux by simply printing the right reading under the false or misleading text of the *Recueil*.

The four fabliaux whose text we are about to deal with were taken, as has been said, from the Harl. ms. 2253. This manuscript is not described by Montaiglon, but information as to its age and character will be found in H. L. D. Ward's *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Vol. I, pp. 813 ff. It will suffice here to remark that Harl. 2253 is not a difficult manuscript to read, a fact which makes it rather hard to understand why or

how so many mistakes should have found their way into the *Recueil*. Some of these mistakes are very insignificant, to be sure, but others are not, and it is well to add that in philology, at least, one can never know for sure that a trifling error may not turn out to be a deal less trifling than it seemed. In other words, there is no good reason for being inaccurate whether the inaccuracy seem great or small.

Following the order of my note-books, I shall take up the four fabliaux thus: (a) LII, *Le Roi d'Angleterre et le Jongleur d'Ely*, (b) XLVIII, *Le Dit de la Gageure*, (c) XLVII, *Du Chevalier à la Corbeille*, (d) XCIX, *Des Trois Dames*. In Vol. II, p. 356, of the *Recueil* occurs the statement that "Le ms. met toujours *n* a la place de *u*." *Souvent* or *en général* would be nearer the truth.

The first of these (a) is printed in Vol. II, pp. 242-256, and is numbered LII. I shall quote each inaccurate verse exactly as it appears in the *Recueil*. The manuscript reading will immediately follow. The verse-numbering of the *Recueil* is so meagre and often so inaccurate that I shall refer simply to the pages.

Page 251,

- (1) Com il se tient valer fient de cheval !
chyual

- (2) Si derra ascun de soun grée
dirra

Page 253,

- (3) Si ele soit auqua hontouse
augue
(4) Rybaudz en dirront villeynie.
Rybaudz en dirrount uileynye
(5) Si dirra ascun qe vus regard :
regart

Page 254,

- (6) "Cesti mavaiz chien recreant
recreaunt
(7) Si je su mesgre : "Bels douz cher,
belz donz cher
(8) Mort est de faim ; il n'a qe manger."
faym

Page 255,

- (9) Tost dirrount : "C'est un bereu."
boscu or *bescu*. At all events, not *berou*.
(10) Cesti n'est mie matle, mès femmel."
madle

- (11) E si petitz sei de estat,
se

- (12) Car nulle rien ne purroi fere
Qar nulle rien purroi fere

- (13) Vus dites voir, a mien ascient.
asscient

- (14) Coment me puis countener

For *puis* the manuscript gives a character resembling j' if the apostrophe be curved over to meet the dot and the tail of the j be carried up so as to meet the bottom of the apostrophe. [As *suis* (<sum) is often represented by *su* in Harl. 2253, perhaps the abbreviation might reasonably be taken to mean *pu*. This, however, is purely a suggestion and *puis* is preferable, though *pus* occurs. See (19).]

- (15) Si vus vostre estat veillez bien garder,
vueillez

Page 256,

- (16) Car vos meymes savez bien
Qar

- (17) E le latim est ensi :
latyn

The second (b), also from Harl. 2253, is printed in Vol. II, pp. 193-196, and is numbered XLVIII. I quote each inaccurate verse exactly as it appears in the *Recueil*. The manuscript reading immediately follows.

Page 193,

- (18) E l'esquyer la daunoa,
daunea

Page 195,

- (19) Puis pensout si a bon mester
Pus

[See (14).]

- (20) Si l'a en my le coun donné :
done

The third (c), also from Harl. 2253, is printed in Vol. II, pp. 183-186, and is numbered XLVII. I quote each inaccurate verse with the correct reading underneath.

Page 183,

- (21) S'entraimerent jadis d'amour
Sentramerent

Page 184,

- (22) E mès q'il geytee ne l'aust,

Perhaps *la ust*—the ms. reading—(<*illam habuisset) would be a better reading, or even

l'ust,—to “edit” the text. At any rate *oust* could hardly be considered otherwise than as an orthographic variant of *eust*; for *habuisset* regularly gives *eust* in Anglo-Norman, as in Francian. For Anglo-Norman texts the versification test is most untrustworthy because Anglo-Norman scribes, and probably a majority of the Anglo-Norman writers, were far less scrupulous about having the right number of syllables in each verse than were their contemporaries in France. Proof of this statement is hardly necessary, yet I may cite a few verses from the fabliaux, choosing them at random :

Vol. II, p. 93,

S'ele seüst que il l'amast,

[But *el* often occurs instead of *ele*. Here, however, every syllable is needed to make the eight.]

Ib., p. 98,

S'el le seüst, n'en pallast ja.

So much for *seust* (< *sapuisset*).

Ib., p. 259,

Quar pleust ore Dieu et Saint Leu

So much for a single example of *pleust* (< *placuisset*). Now as to *eust* (< *habuisset*).

Ib., p. 217,

Ne vodroient k'il eüst enui.

[*vodroient* probably is trisyllabic. If so, *eust* is a monosyllable, granting the versification to be correct.]

Ib., p. 218,

Ke de sa femme eust felt (*sic*) folie.

[Here, if the versification is correct, *eust* must count as a monosyllable.]

Ib., p. 222,

E s'il ne eust de li le amur.

[Here *eust* may count for two syllables; for the definite article is no doubt elided.]

Ib., p. 228,

Com il ne eüst el cors grevance : [*eust* dissyllabic?]

The quotations seem to show clearly enough that *eust* had not yet become exclusively monosyllabic, but that it was often so. Hence the *larust* of the manuscript may justifiably be divided thus : *la ust*, a division which is furthermore authorized by

the fact that *oust* would be either very archaic, if the *a* is not due to mere carelessness on the scribe's part. In *oust* the *a* would, of course, be atonic. See (24).]

Ib., p. 185,

(23) D'un affere qe ge repens."
de um affere qe ie pens

[Amended by the editors, as is done elsewhere, without their calling attention to the fact in the *Notes et Variantes*.]

Ib., p. 185,

(24) Qar s'el eust la langue trayte,
Quar si ele ust la lange trayte.

[Amended as above, and without acknowledgment.]

Ib., p. 186,

(25) Auxi de nuytz come de jurs.
iours.

Ib., p. 186,

(26) Um di qe veeille gent sunt sourdz,
dit

Ib., p. 186,

(27) Si Diu peüst mon cors salver,
dieu

Ib., p. 186,

(28) Q'uncore anuit seynz seroi,
seynz serroi

Ib., p. 187,

(29) Qar, si saienz estoyez mis
sa eynz estoiez

Ib., p. 188,

(30) E que la gent se soit cochee ;
cochié

[Not *cochié* (which is impossible).]

The fourth (*d*), XCIX. (DES. III. DAMES), also from Harl. 2253, fol. 110 ff., is printed in Vol. IV of the *Recueil*, pp. 128–132. As before I shall cite each verse exactly as it is printed, then give the manuscript reading underneath.

Vol. IV, p. 128,

(31) Puisque de fabler ay comencé,
Puis qe

[A most insignificant difference; but why not show it, as is done elsewhere in the *Recueil*?]

Ib., p. 128,

(32) Ja n'yert pur moun travail lessé :
ia ny ert

[No note on this apparently correct alteration.]

Ib., p. 128,

- (33) En pelrynage come vouué avoyent,
vowe [> English "vow."]

Ib., p. 128,

- (34) La une garda en un sentier :
senter

Ib., p. 129,

- (35) Devant nous est une mesons de noneynz,
mesone

[Mr. Herbert of the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum, thought the final letter was meant for an *e*, and in Vol. II, p. 333, note 14, reads : "—*Meson ; ms., *Mesone*." I doubt this *e* for etymological reasons. At all events, it would be a curious *s*. As for *mesone*, cf. *ung*, with its useless *g*, occurring constantly in documents that also give us *un*. For this fabliau versification affords no criterion : it would be hard to find an example of greater irregularity, even in Anglo-Norman poetry. This dialect was already in an advanced state of decomposition, and it need hardly be said that the rules of versification were broken as often and as violently as were the rules of grammar. In other words, French was becoming unfamiliar to men who were hearing English spoken on every hand. The French now spoken in Canada and New England, and much of the German spoken in the United States, offer an unmistakable and convincing analogy.]

Ib., p. 129,

- (36) Mout seinte, dames e chapeleynz
Qe Dieu servent nuit e jour.

[The manuscript is, of course, not punctuated, and it seems to me that the editors should have put no comma after *seinte*. Obviously *seinte* modifies *dames*. The lack of an *s* on *seinte* is not in the least astounding. It was silent in this case anyhow, and furthermore, such failures of ocular agreements are so common in Anglo-Norman documents that it is unnecessary even to cite examples.]

Ib., p. 130,

- (37) E meyntenant ount demandez
demaundez

Ib., p. 130,

- (38) Mès il ne urent qe poi esté,
estee [Riming with *desgree*.]

In the *Avant-propos* with which Montaignon

introduces the *Recueil* he cites, apparently as a statement of an ideal to be aimed at, these words, written by Victor Leclerc : "Il est permis de désirer encore une édition collective des Fabliaux, rigoureusement revue sur les manuscrits, correcte, méthodique, bornée au seul genre des contes, enrichie et non surchargée d'éclaircissements, de gloses, de parallèles avec les divers pays et qui apprenne à la France quel rang elle occupait dans la poésie narrative au XIII^e siècle." No doubt this ideal goal is in the main pretty constantly and faithfully aimed at throughout the *Recueil*; yet whoever compares the printed text with the manuscript known as Harley 2253 will discover at least the differences above noted. However small they may be or seem, these differences are worth pointing out in order that those who devote their energies to studying the Fabliaux may not rely all too trustfully on the printed text of the *Recueil général*. And may we not conclude that many a modern editor is after all only a descendant of the old scribes, who copied sometimes well, sometimes ill. Perhaps the main difference is that the modern scribe is more self-conscious. In copying some old document he is oftener and more keenly aware of an obligation to be loyal to it as a record of the past. Those who are to benefit by his work rely on him to be accurate. In studying old texts no suspicion is more annoying than the suspicion that this or that reading is not what the manuscript or printed book contains; yet to the vast majority of scholars the original source is usually inaccessible. It seems desirable, therefore, that the original, if there be only one, should be accurately reproduced in every case, whatever textual revision is attempted outside the text; and if there is more than one "original," then the editor should at least enable his reader to know the exact text of the original which the editor considers the best.

The movement set on foot by Prof. Gayley of the University of California, has received the cordial approbation of scholars far and wide. Genuine facsimiles, not humbugs like the *Pathelin* of Baillieu's Bibliothèque Gothique, are needed everywhere, but especially in the United States. As the reverence for authority wanes, especially for the mere printed opinion of an individual as to what really ought to have been written by some

older scribe, the value set on facsimiles¹ is bound to increase. A camera is the trustiest scribe of all. It is a pity that photography was unknown to the earliest editors. They might have glossed as often as they felt impelled. The importance of the fact that botanists, and like scientists, can not easily alter their specimens before offering them to their fellow students can hardly be too highly estimated.

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THE NUMBERS IN THE MANUSCRIPT OF THE OLD ENGLISH *Judith*.

The opinion has long been current that the Old English *Judith*, as we have it, represents but a small part of a long poem, the rest of which is lost. On the other hand, basing their theory upon the extraordinary unity of the portion which remains, several scholars have recently reached the conclusion that the *Judith* is almost complete as it stands. Against this seemingly plausible hypothesis is urged the apparently insurmountable difficulty that in the manuscript are found the numbers x, xi, xii, which would seem to indicate that divisions i-ix, inclusive, have been lost, save for the last fourteen lines of ix.

Now, it is a curious coincidence, and possibly a significant one, that these numbers correspond, respectively, to the 10th verse of chapter 12, the 11th verse of chapter 13, and the 12th verse of chapter 14, of the *Apocryphal Judith*. In each case, the thought, at that point in the poem where a number is inserted, will be found to fit the thought of a corresponding verse in the *Apocryphal* version. More specifically, the number x occurs in the manuscript of the poem just before line 15, and marks the beginning of the feast prepared by Holofernes "*on the fourth day after Judith first sought him.*" Verse 10 of chapter

12 in the *Apocryphal Judith* (the numbering of the English version corresponding, in this case, to that of the Vulgate), reads: "*And in the fourth day Holofernes made a feast.*" The number xi occurs in the manuscript before line 122, where we are told that God granted success to Judith (this being merely a repetition of the poet's thought added here to connect what precedes with what follows), and then that she placed the head of Holofernes in a bag and returned to Bethulia. Verse 11 of chapter 13 of the Vulgate (the English version being differently numbered here) states that Judith put the head of Holofernes in a bag and returned to Bethulia. Number xii occurs in the manuscript before line 236, where the leaders of the Assyrian army become terrified, send word to the "oldest thanes," who assemble, and then proceed to the tent of Holofernes. Lines 236-241^a are resumptive, the important facts, *i. e.*, the summoning of officers and the rush to Holofernes' tent, immediately following. Verse 12 of chapter 14 of the Vulgate shows the Assyrian leaders assembling before the tent of Holofernes.

These three numbers, x, xi, xii, may be regarded as sign-posts along the poet's path, set up to direct him from one important event to another. We naturally wonder what other verses of the chapters in the Vulgate, which precede the account represented by the present poem, served as similar landmarks. The conclusion is as startling as it is easily reached. By considering the thought expressed in verse 9 of chapter 11, 8 of chapter 10, and so on through chapter 8, where Judith is first mentioned, we obtain a satisfactory plan of the whole poem as it may have been written. This may be seen at a glance from the following table:

Verse 6 of chapter 8: Judith's sincere mourning for her husband.

Verse 7 of chapter 9: Judith prays for salvation from the Assyrians, whom she would have God treat as He once treated the Egyptians.

Verse 8 of chapter 10: The blessings of the elders bestowed upon Judith just before her departure to Bethulia.

¹ Thanks to Mme. James de Rothschild and to M. Émile Picot, a facsimile of the *Patelin*, printed at Paris about 1500 by Marion de Malaunoy, widow of Master Pierre Le Caron, has lately been published by the Société des Anciens Textes français. Le Roy's edition may before long be published in facsimile.